

Without You (What would I do) by idontshaveforshe_yesyoudo

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Summary:

It snows properly for the first time a few nights after the snowball. Mike takes a minute to stare out into the pre-sunrise town, streets empty and quiet. He has a feeling that it's going to be a good day.

Sometimes, the snow can have unplanned effects on Mikes friends, but at the end of the day, they can all count on each other

Without You (What would I do)

Author's Note:

i would like to thank stranger things for getting me out of my writers block to write this piece of fluff. also the police and bowie for getting me through my week.

title from without you by bowie which is a banger, check it out

feedback always much appreciated xx

It snows properly for the first time a few nights after the snowball. It had been bone-crushingly cold all week and when Mike opens his curtains in the morning Hawkins is covered in white fluff. He takes a minute to stare out into the pre-sunrise town, streets empty and quiet. He has a feeling that it's going to be a good day.

Snow does not change anything about school and he and the rest of the party are stuck in the daily routine of tests, hallway discussions and shitty chairs, but the mood lifts considerably towards the end of the day. Steve promised that he'd pick them up after the last lesson and drive them out to the cabin in the woods and the thought of seeing El makes Mike jittery. He's still not over the fact that she's back and in reach for him again. It's not like he can visit her anytime he'd like, but the few times a week have to be enough for now.

When the last bell rings everyone hurries to their lockers to bundle up in hats and gloves. They meet up at Dustins locker and when Mike arrives, him and Max are already in a discussion about the perfect snowman.

Will is quietly listening, but then asks, "Do you think there's enough snow already?"

Lucas joins them and they leave the building and realise that the

several inches of snow from last night and the constant snowfall this afternoon should definitely be enough for a few snowmen, especially out in the woods where nobody shovels it away.

Steve's car is sitting on the curb near the school and he honks impatiently when he sees them. Dustin, of course, calls shotgun and gets in up front while Mike, Dustin, Lucas and Max pile in in the backseat. It's a tight fit, but it has worked before and while it can't be entirely legal, Mike is sure that the Chief would close an eye in their case. Well, mostly sure. He tries not to think about too much.

The drive doesn't take more than half an hour, filled with chatter and music. They tell Steve about their day (which he pretends to be only mildly interested in), play with the lever of the radio and settle on a station that plays cheesy pop songs (which he pretends to hate), and ask him several questions about his relationship with Jonathan and Nancy (which he pretends to find annoying).

Then they pull up in a dead-end and Steve ushers everyone out of his car.

"Now hurry up, shitheads, I don't have all afternoon."

He accompanies them to the cabin, makes sure no one falls over the tripwire, and then tells them to be ready when he picks them up at six thirty *or so help him*. They wave and shout after him as he walks back to his car and when Mike turns around the cabin door is open and El's face grins down at them.

"El! Hi!" Dustin shouts and the others cheer as El comes down the stairs, wrapped in several layers of clothing, wearing a bright red hat on her head and an equally as bright smile on her face.

She greets them all collectively, and then, to Mike's joy, wraps her arms around his neck and hugs him tight.

"Hi, Mike."

"Hi, El."

His arms are wrapped around her body and he's enjoying the warmth of the embrace when suddenly several kilos of snow hit his back and

he feels at least half of it fall inside his jacket. He screams in surprise and tumbles backwards, trips over a branch on the floor and falls flat on his back.

When he sits up to find out what just happened he's confronted with his friends in stitches and a giggling El trying to discreetly wipe the blood from her nose.

"You!" he whispers, affronted that she'd betray him like this, as he watches El high-fiving a still laughing Max.

Then Max is hit with a snowball by Dustin and soon enough, there's a full-blown snowball fight happening.

Mike teams up with Lucas for a while and they manage to catch Max under a tree and then shake said tree enough to have her buried under snow, but the opportunity is too perfect to pass up, so Mike pushes Lucas forward a bit and trips him so that both his friends are now lying under a mountain of snow. Needless to say, their alliance is finished after that.

He runs around alone, throws snowballs, gets hit right in the face by El, and he's just hurrying to form a snowball to stage a counter-attack when he sees El's smile fall. He watches her drop the snow in her hands as they start to shake and hurries over to catch her just before she falls to her knees.

"Hey, *hey*." He holds her up, watching her intently. "What's wrong?"

Her cheeks are flushed from the cold and she snuffles once, her bottom lip trembling.

"Cold."

He doesn't understand why the cold would have her react like this, so he asks her, "Where?"

Her voice is more urgent as she repeats herself.

"*Cold*, Mike."

It hits him, then. He doesn't know the full story of what happened

last winter, before Hopper took her in, but she must've spent at least two months alone in the woods, surviving in the cold. No wonder that all this snow makes her uneasy.

"Do you wanna go inside? Warm up a bit?"

He doesn't wait for her nod, already starts manoeuvring them inside. The others are deep into their fight, so he figures they'll be alright without him and El for a while.

When they're in the cabin he helps her take off all the snowed-in clothes and then moves her onto the couch. There's a blanket lying on the floor that he uses to wrap her in tightly. She's still trembling so he moves to the kitchen, opens and closes cupboard doors until he finds a jar of cocoa powder. He heats up milk from the fridge and fills it into two mugs, all while regularly throwing looks over to El on the sofa, checking if she's still halfway alright.

Balancing two mugs filled to the brim with hot chocolate is a challenge, but he manages somehow and the thankful smile on her face when he hands her one of them makes it worth it.

He sits down next to her on the couch awkwardly, with both feet on the floor and a straight back, until El throws the corner of her blanket over his legs and lays her head on his shoulder. He realises then that this is okay, that there's nothing to be nervous about, and pulls his knees closer to his chest while balancing his mug over them. They sit like that, in comfortable silence, cuddled up under the blanket, and if it were anyone else Mike would probably find this weird, but this is *El*, this is the girl he literally spent all of last year waiting for, this is the girl he'd fight a hundred demo-dogs for if she asked him to, so he stops his brain from running at a hundred miles per minute and just, *breathes*.

It's nice, he thinks. Their breaths are synched up, her hair, now in soft curls, tickles his neck, her hands have stopped shaking and are instead wrapped around the mug of hot chocolate.

They stay cuddled up like this for a few minutes in their little bubble until the door suddenly bursts open.

Will stumbles in and gives them a sheepish smile.

“Got cold.”

It's the second time that Mike hears this in the past hour, so he looks at his best friend for a moment, takes in the slightly frazzled appearance, the look in his eyes that make every cell in Mike's body turn on warning lights, makes his insides shout, *something's not right*. He feels like a fucking idiot, could punch himself in the face for not realising that being stuck freezing in the Upside Down for a week will affect your reaction to snow and cold weather, too.

But he can tell that Will is not in the mood to have a long discussion about why he came inside instead of building a snowman or whatever it is the remaining three are doing out there. So Mike moves a bit closer to El and lifts the blanket on his other side, motioning for Will to get in. Will takes off his outdoor clothes and comes over, hesitating for a second but then slipping under the blanket with the other two. Mike hands him his hot chocolate and quirks a smile and El grabs the remote to turn on the TV.

She settles on some random comedy and Mike is sure none of them is really paying attention, but it's good as background noise.

They stay like this for a while, not talking, and he feels the tension seep out of Will's shoulders, watches El set down her empty mug and grab his hand tightly with hers, realises that for the first time in what feels like forever, his own head is quiet, no more thoughts whirling around it, and he can *breathe*.

He loses track of time, but a little later Max tumbles through the door, followed by Dustin and Lucas, all of them laughing, breathless. They join the others in front of the TV, sprawl out on the floor, lean against the sofa. They tell them about the snowmen they built, that they tried to form D'art out of snow but failed miserably, that they gave El's snowman a nosebleed with a bit of red yarn from Dustin's scarf, that they wanted to build a snowman for Hopper but figured that the Chief would hate them even more than now if they did.

It's not as calm as it was just a minute ago, with the three newcomers joking around and telling stories, but eventually, Will cracks a stupid

joke or two and El buries her face in Mikes sweater, her whole body shaking with giggles at the thought of a snowman formed like an Eggo. At one point, Mikes eyes meet Max' and she smiles wide, nose scrunching up and corners of her eyes crinkling, and he can't help but grin back equally as wide.

This, he thinks, is what happiness feels like.